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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Syria/Lebanon, Syria/Iraq, Abbas-Olmert-Rice Meeting,
Syria/Iran (2/20)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Feb. 20 reported that President Asad received former Lebanese Prime Minister Dr. Salim al-Huss on Feb. 19. Talks touched upon regional and international developments, particularly in Lebanon, and the importance of strengthening national unity on the basis of Lebanon's Arab affiliation.

On Syrian-Iraqi relations, papers reported VP Shara's meeting with Akram al-Hakim, Iraqi Minister of State for National Dialogue Affairs. Shara stressed that national reconciliation is indispensable for Iraq to regain its security, safeguard the unity of its land and people, and achieve its freedom and sovereignty. He renewed Syria's offer of anything that would help achieve national accord among Iraqis. In a statement to reporters after the meeting, Al-Hakim stressed the importance of the role that Syria is playing with regard to Iraq. He said he sensed from his meeting with President Asad and other Syrian officials a full Syrian readiness to support the political process and the reconciliation plan in Iraq. "This is a big gain for Iraq," he said.

All papers reported that the Lebanese party al-Ittihad demanded on Feb. 19 an immediate expulsion of Jeffrey Feltman, the US ambassador to Lebanon, due to his intervention in Lebanese internal affairs. The party's statement denounced the Ambassador's continuous interference in Lebanese internal affairs and his clear role in stirring up sedition among the Lebanese, as well as in hindering every Arab effort to solve the Lebanese crisis. For his part, the head of Al-Marada Lebanese Movement, Sulaiman Franjeh, confirmed the important current role of the Lebanese opposition, calling upon all Lebanese to show great self-control in facing the provocations to which they have been exposed.

News reports featured an interview with al-Arabiya Satellite Channel broadcast Feb. 19 with Mohammed al-Hurani, Fatah Movement spokesman, who stressed his movement's commitment to the national unity government. Al-Hurani said that "Israel exploits the conditions of the Quartet as a pretext not to revive peace negotiations with Palestinians." He pointed out that the tripartite American-Israeli-Palestinian summit meeting in Jerusalem failed to make any startling breakthroughs. Al-Hurani called for Arab and international efforts to hold an international conference to find a final solution to the Palestinian issue and lift the siege on

Palestinians.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad reviews with former Lebanese PM al-Huss importance of enhancing Lebanon's national unity" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/20)

"Vice-President Shara stresses Syria's concern about Iraq's national accord during his meeting with Minister of State for National Dialogue Affairs Akram al-Hakim" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/20)

"More than 8 American soldiers killed, 23 injured in Iraq. Returning US soldiers confuse psychologists" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/20)

"The Abbas-Olmert-Rice meeting brings nothing new except for Israeli preconditions. Fatah and Hamas: Rice has ignored the Mecca Accord" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/20)

"Lebanese President Lahoud warns against the dangers of the current stage. Lebanese condemnations of US intervention in Lebanon's internal affairs on the rise" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/20)

"Berri: The opposition contemplates civil disobedience" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 2/20)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Cooperation in the Service of the Region's Issues"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (2/20): "President Asad's visit to Tehran enjoys extraordinary importance because it sought to strengthen relations and explore new horizons for promoting bilateral cooperation in all fields. The aim was also to discuss the issues of the region and underline the clear positions of the two countries and their good efforts to bring stability back to the region, which the reckless, foolish, and adventurous US policy has pushed toward chaos, tension, and volatility, the like of which it has never experienced before. This exposes the tricks, lies, and deception that the US Administration and Israel practice to distort the truth of the Syrian and Iranian positions...."

"With regard to the Palestinian situation and its complications and the efforts that are being made to contain the civil strife that the Israeli and American policies have been working to ignite, Presidents Asad and Ahmadinejad welcomed the Mecca agreement to form a Palestinian national unity government. Thus, they offered their support for the Palestinian accord as the only way out of the crisis and the decisive factor in foiling Israeli and American plans to foment domestic strife so that the Palestinian cause might be liquidated at the hands of its own people...."

"On the Iraqi crisis, the two presidents expressed their support for the ongoing political process in Iraq and the need for all the components of the Iraqi people to participate in it to safeguard Iraq's geopolitical unity, Arab affiliation, and Islamic identity, and to renounce the sedition that the US occupation is working to foment in that country as part of the destructive chaos policy it is trying to promote in the entire region to compensate for its miserable failure to implement its plan of restructuring the Middle East in a way that serves the vital interests of Israel and the ruling American right...."

"Preconditions"

Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishrin, wrote

(2/20): "It is surprising that Israel is calling on Palestinians to respond to the demands of the international community while Tel Aviv is ignoring UN resolutions and even the recommendations of the International Quartet itself....

"Israel is not serious about any negotiations.... The United States implements only what Israel wants.... So through the preconditions they set to meet the Palestinians, Israel and the United States fabricate claims and preconceived positions to close the horizon of a permanent solution to the Palestinian problem...."

"An Israeli Policy Implemented by the US"

Ahmad Suwwan, a commentator in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (2/20): "The American activity on the Palestinian-Israeli track is mostly a public relations effort, because the United States cannot move on the Palestinian question except in accordance with Israeli positions, plans, and gains....

"Judging from recent American positions and statements, the results of the three-way meeting among Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice are disappointing, as the meeting will not lead to the resumption of negotiations and the reactivation of the peace process on the Palestinian track....

"Olmert, who is experiencing a difficult situation domestically, does not want to commit himself to anything whose price he is unable to pay."

Corbin